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A
SERMON,
UPON THE DEATH OF HIS LATE MAJESTY,
WILLIAM IV.
AND
UPON THE ACCESSION OF OUR PRESENT SOVEREIGN,
QUEEN VICTORIA;
PREACHED AT
THE EPISCOPAL CHURCHES,
SAINT JOHN, NEW-BRUNSWICK.

By THE REVEREND I. W. D. GRAY, A. M.,
ASSISTANT MINISTER.

“ Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates,
to be ready to every good work.”—*Titus* iii. 1.

SAINT JOHN :

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THE following Sermon was not originally written with any view to its being printed, but has been subsequently committed to the Press, in consequence of a request to that effect from several members of the congregations to which it was delivered.

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SERMON.

DANIEL II.—21.

“ He removeth Kings, and setteth up Kings.”

THERE is no point more clearly asserted in Scripture, than the constantly superintending care and universally directing agency of Divine Providence. We are there taught that the minutest object in this lower Creation engages the attention and shares the protection of the Omniscient God: “without Him, it is said, not a sparrow falleth to the ground.” And reason, upon this point, is in perfect harmony with Scripture; for no sound mind after duly weighing the subject, could admit the idea, that the hand which gave existence to the Visible Creation, would not be exerted for its preservation; that what had once emanated from the wisdom and power of the Supreme Architect, should afterwards be surrendered to the disposal of a blind and uncertain chance. We have undoubtedly, the evidence of reason to convince us, that the smallest being that lives, in the wide creation of God, is, at all times, an object of care to the Eternal Sovereign above: and Revelation adds its decisive attestation upon the subject. How much more, then, may we expect to find this vital truth declared and insisted upon, with regard to those who occupy the most prominent stations in Society, whose power and actions have an extensive influence upon the course and character of human events! And here likewise, when we open the volume of inspiration, our anticipations are fully realized. We find in it, as we might reasonably expect to do, the most unequivocal statements with regard to the minute inspection and controlling agency of God, in determining the lot of earthly Sovereigns, and are pointed to a class of important duties which devolve upon us in consequence of this circumstance. I need offer you no apology, my Brethern, for making these points the topics of discussion this morning, while the sable emblems around us, and the altered forms of our Liturgy remind us that the Sceptre of our Kingdom has gone into other hands.

I. First then, I invite your attention to this admitted, but insufficiently considered truth; that *the Providence of God determines the lot of earthly Sovereigns.*

1. His province it is to *choose* them from the rest of mankind to occupy the high station assigned them, and by the wise disposition of his Providence, so to arrange events, that at the appointed season they shall attain and fill that station. The consideration of this point was urgently pressed upon the minds of the Israelites, by the prophetic language of Moses, even prior to their entrance upon the promised land. While as yet they had no King but the everlasting Jehovah, and had never cherished the hope of placing themselves under the direction of an earthly Monarch, this was the instruction he gave them. "When thou art come unto the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, and shalt possess it, and shalt dwell therein, and shalt say, I will set a King over me, like as all the nations that are about me; thou shalt in any wise set *him* King over thee, whom the Lord thy God shall choose."* And the authority of this injunction, was formally acknowledged by that people in after ages, when under the influence of religious declension they became dissatisfied with the existing mode of judicial administration among them, and sinfully desired to have a king, in imitation of the surrounding nations.† A king was granted to their request, but it was the man whom God selected. "Samuel said unto Saul, the Lord sent me to anoint thee to be King over his people, over Israel."‡ A successor was chosen to Saul, but the choice was still the Lord's.¶ The sons of Jesse are all in succession rejected by the Prophet, with the declaration, "The Lord hath not chosen this;" but when David comes forth, immediately, "the Lord says, arise anoint him, for this is he;"§ and so clearly was this principle understood and recognised by the Jewish nation, that the distinctive title of their monarchs was, "The Lord's anointed." Nor was it that peculiar people alone that shared in this instance the providential care of the Most High; it extended alike to all the other nations of the earth. Among these, it is true, the controlling agency of God was neither formally acknowledged nor understood, but it was not the less real because unperceived, not the less certain because unconfessed by any external form or ceremony. It was as true of Pharoah, of Nebuchadnezzar,

* Deut. xvii. 14-15. † 1 Sam. viii. 19-22. ‡ 1 Sam. xv. 1. ¶ 1 Sam. xvi. 1.
§ 1 Sam. xvi. 6-12.

and of Senacherib, that God placed them upon the thrones of their respective kingdoms, as of any sovereign who swayed the sceptre of the Jewish empire. "By me," said the Almighty, without any limitation or exception, "kings reign and princes decree justice,"* and in full accordance with this declaration, his inspired Apostle says, "the powers that be," whatever nation they preside over, "are ordained of God."†

2. Nor is it only the selection of earthly sovereigns that is to be traced to the controlling agency of Divine Providence, *their relative power and influence*, whether in Council or in arms are derived from the same source, and are to be regarded, in like manner, as exclusively the gift of God. We are apt to forget this important truth, while turning to the history of past ages, and admiring the achievements of the men who have been noted for their wisdom, courage, or success. We follow them in their rapid career from land to land, from victory to victory, and remember not whose agents they were. Filled with wonder at the greatness of the men, we transfer the glory of their actions from that Eternal Sovereign, who is the sole fountain of wisdom and strength, to the insignificant creature, who was the mere instrument of carrying into effect the comprehensive designs of His Providence. But when we turn to the prophetic pages of holy writ, this error is immediately corrected. There by the pencil of inspiration we see depicted beforehand, but with the utmost precision, the rise and progress and decline of earthly sovereignties.‡ We see what part each leading instrument was designed to execute, and can trace to its legitimate source the momentary lustre of human glory. There, in a single instant, we discover why a Cyrus, § an Alexander, † and a Cæsar, || were raised up to wield the sceptres of the mighty empires over which they presided, and whence it was that they stood distinguished from their contemporaries by the vigour of their talents, the power of their arms, and the splendour of their victories.

3. We may further remark that *God renders earthly Sovereigns a blessing or a curse to the people over whom they preside, according as they regard, or disregard, the laws which He enjoins.* The previous wickedness of a people, in abusing the mercies, slighting the warnings, and despising the judgments of heaven, is a reason why God permits a nation

* Prov. viii. 15. † Rom. xiii. 1. ‡ Dan. ii. 36-45; Isai. xiii. 19-22; Zeph. ii. 13-15; Isai. xxiii; Ezek. xxix. 8-12. § Isai. xlv. 24-28; Ibid. xlv. 1-4. † Dan. vii. 6; Ibid. viii. 4-7. || Dan. vii. 7.

to be ruled by a monarch who is wanting either in the will or capacity to promote its real interests. There are two descriptions of Sovereigns who are a curse to their subjects—weak Sovereigns, and wicked Sovereigns. The former are incapable of wielding the power entrusted to them for the suppression of vice, and the encouragement of virtue.* They are not, in point of fact, what their office requires them to be, “a terror to evil doers,” but, reversing the apostolical description, may be said, in this respect, “to bear the sword in vain.”† Hence we find it threatened among the severest judgments which God determined to bring upon the people of Judah, for their wickedness, that “he would give children to be their princes, and that babes should rule over them;”‡ in other words, that persons of weak understanding, and divested of the requisite qualifications for government, should preside over the affairs of their nation. But if weak Sovereigns prove a curse to the nations they rule over, how much more, in the ordinary course of things, must they incur this reproach, who are devoid of virtuous principle, and whose extensive influence is thrown entirely into the opposite scale. In our own most favoured nation, things have hitherto been so happily constituted, that if, instead of being blessed as we have been for a long period with Monarchs who have aimed at the advancement of their people’s happiness, it had been the will of Providence to suffer men of opposite principles to sway the British sceptre, their power of doing evil would have been, no doubt, in many important respects, restrained by salutary laws; still it cannot be questioned that in our nation, as in all others, a licentious court must in time produce a licentious people, and that a licentious people cannot long be a free people, or a happy people. On the other hand, how extensive is the good, how innumerable are the blessings, how incalculable the benefits that must flow down upon a people through the medium of a Prince whose mind and heart are thoroughly imbued with Christian principles; who makes the revealed will of heaven the standard of right and wrong, and who studies the highest and purest interests of his subjects, and aims, in his public and private life, at the glory of the King of Heaven! Truly we might say of such a Monarch, as the King of Tyre said in a letter to David’s successor, “Because the Lord hath loved his people, he hath made thee King over them.”†

* 2 Chron. xiii. 7. † Rom. xiii. 3-4. ‡ Isai. iii. 4. † 2 Chron. ii. 11.

4. Thus it is obvious with regard to those exalted persons who are called to preside over the nations of the world, that God chooses them, invests them with their power, and employs them as his instruments ; and we may add to these observations one further particular, that *He terminates their earthly career when their work is done.* Their lives, like the lives of all upon whom the withering sentence of Divine wrath has fallen, are uncertain and precarious. Death is no respecter of persons. The sable emblems which now surround us, my brethern, bespeak the utter insignificance of human power and glory. They remind us that the same awful curse must be inflicted upon the monarch and the beggar, upon him who holds the sceptre, and wears the purple robe, and upon him who sustains a wretched existence in the midst of poverty and want. Both must meet the same unrelenting foe ; both must yield for a season to his superior power ; both must return to the same level in the dust from whence they were taken. What an appeal to us upon this point is made by the history of that illustrious family to which our departed monarch belonged. But a few years since what flattering hopes, what cheering prospects opened before it ! It stood like a noble tree planted by the rivers of water, filled with sap, covered with verdure, and spreading its strong and healthy branches on every hand. Now, how has it withered and decayed ! how has its glory faded ! how have its honours fallen ! The very children of our congregations have lived, while three of its illustrious members have descended from the throne to the sepulchre, and while other branches of it, upon whose opening glories or matured wisdom, the hopes of a loyal and admiring nation were built, have practically taught us to feel the truth of that inspired counsel, "Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help ; for his breath goeth forth, he returneth to the earth, in that very day his thoughts perish."*

II. And does the recognition of these solemn truths impose upon us no particular duties ? Are we permitted through the glass of revelation to contemplate a divine agency in the conduct and destiny of our earthly sovereigns, and is this important knowledge to produce no practical effect upon our views and feelings ? Are we to hear the eternal sovereign declaring, "By me kings reign, and princes decree justice ;"† or from his inspired messenger the corresponding assurance

* Psal. cxlvi. 3-4. † Prov. viii. 15.

that "the powers that be are ordained of God," || and yet regard them as if no spiritual light had ever dawned upon us from above? Assuredly not. There are, there must be peculiar duties which devolve upon us in consequence of our possessing this information, and for the discharge of which we shall be held responsible at the tribunal of Christ.

1. Are earthly sovereigns chosen of God? Are they raised to their elevated stations by the hand of Omnipotence? Is it under the direction of an all-wise Providence that they are exalted to sit in "the high-places of the earth," and control the affairs of the nations? Then let us cherish in our hearts and exhibit in our lives that *honour and respect* for them which such a persuasion demands. It was the salutary counsel of that favoured monarch upon whom the Lord was pleased to pour out a more than ordinary share of heavenly wisdom, "My son, fear thou the Lord and the King, and meddle not with them that are given to change;" ‡ and under the brighter effulgence of the Gospel revelation, we hear the same law proclaimed with equal plainness, and associated with others which justly claim our most profound respect.—"Honour all men," says the the inspired Apostle, "love the brotherhood, fear God, honour the King." †

There is a reverence due to the ruling powers of a land which is independent of their personal character, a deference which we owe to the *office* they sustain, and to the *authority* with which they are invested from above. It is a deference which excludes all rash censures of their conduct; for it is written, "Thou shalt not speak evil of the Ruler of thy people:" || a deference which prohibits personal violence, even where the conduct of a prince is wholly unjustifiable. A fine illustration of this truth may be seen in the history of Saul, the first King of God's chosen people. Saul, though divinely chosen, and lawfully invested with royal power, had through his own wilful disobedience, entirely forfeited the favour of the Most High, and was, at the period alluded to, surrendered to a spirit of delusion. God had abandoned him; Samuel had withdrawn from his society; and his subjects in general had ceased to cherish that respect for his character which was still paid, and justly paid to his office. At this season, while pursuing with implacable hatred and malice the life of David, he was unexpectedly placed in the power of his deeply injured subject. How under these circumstances did David act to-

|| Rom. xiii. 1. ‡ Prov. xxiv. 21. † 1 Pet. ii. 17. || Acts, xxiii. 5.

wards him? Did he listen to the advice of his followers when they urged him to destroy him? "The Lord forbid," he exclaimed, "that I should do this thing unto my master, the Lord's anointed, for who can stretch forth his hand against the Lord's anointed and be guiltless?"* And lest we should think the case at all altered under the christian covenant, we are furnished by the Apostle with this decisive testimony—Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers, for there is no power but of God;—whosoever, therefore, resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God, and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation."|| And it is important for us to remember, that this strong language was primarily addressed to the Christians at Rome, living under a heathen domination, and *that* a little after the middle of the first century when Nero was Emperor of Rome, than whom a more cruel, wicked, and lawless tyrant never swayed the sceptre of that imperial city.

2. But reverence to our earthly sovereigns is not the only duty which devolves upon us as the result of knowing that their elevation and power are derived from God; the passage just quoted recals to mind another which is equally important, viz. *a full, willing, and unqualified submission to the laws which in their official capacity they frame or execute.* Yes, my brethren, a full, willing, and unqualified submission, in every instance, without artifice or evasion, however it may affect our temporal interests, or deprive us of some immediate advantage. The passage referred to, teaches us this doctrine with sufficient plainness; but if further confirmation of it be required, I can imagine no testimony more full and unequivocal than that of St. Peter, when he says, "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake :"[†] *to every ordinance of man ! for the Lord's sake !*

But is there then no just exception to this rule? There is one exception, founded upon the superiority of the Divine over human authority. It is acknowledged that man, whatever his rank or office may be, cannot justly enact or enjoin any thing which is contrary to the divine law, as revealed to us in the Scriptures. Whenever he attempts to do so, we are freed from our obligations to submission. No human authority can enforce obedience where this is the case. A firm and determined refusal of it, is the conduct which best becomes the servant of God.

* 1 Sam. xvi. 9. || Rom. xiii. 1-2. † 1 Pet. 2-13.

Here, as in other essential matters, the Bible furnishes us with examples which most aptly illustrate the subject. What for instance can more strikingly exemplify the principle in question, than the noble conduct of Daniel and his associates, when commanded by the powerful despot of Babylon to worship the image he had erected? Every natural feeling, whether of apprehension at his power, or gratitude for his past favours must have strongly pleaded in behalf of compliance with the wishes of the monarch; every consideration likewise, arising from the expediency of such a step, when viewed in reference to their own personal comfort, or that of their fellow captives, must have added its weight to that side of the question. But how did these faithful men decide the point? Without a moment's hesitation they refused compliance, and when the prospect of a "burning fiery furnace" was placed before them, as the inevitable result of disobedience, their memorable answer was expressive alike of respectful deference and invincible firmness, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee, in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O King. But if not, be it known unto thee, that we will not serve thy Gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up."*

And how perfectly does the spirit of the Apostles harmonize in this particular with that of these more ancient servants of God! Behold them standing before the Sanhedrim, summoned thither to be reprimanded for promulgating the faith of Jesus, and to be strictly enjoined to desist in future from this obnoxious proceeding. Did they yield submission to the mandate of their opposers? No, they calmly but firmly refused it. On all common occasions they would readily have acknowledged the authority of the Sanhedrim, which was the highest court of judicature in their country; but when the members of that tribunal interfered with the commands of Christ, they boldly and resolutely denied their power. "Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? asked the High Priest,—then Peter and the other Apostles answered and said, we ought to obey God rather than man."||

This is a very plain decision, and may serve to determine our conduct on all occasions where we are sure our case is

* Dan. iii. 16-18. || Acts, v. 28-29.

similar, but with this exception, we must render an unqualified obedience. It is not allowable to justify our violation of laws, upon a principle of expediency ; nor is it admissible upon christian principles to slight any statute or enactment, because it appears of small importance or trifling moment. The principle of obedience applies as forcibly to what is small as to what is great in its consequences. The words before us are plain upon the subject : “ submit yourselves to *every ordinance.*” Be as faithful and conscientious in the lesser matters of trade and commerce, as in any other. Render unto all their dues, in every instance, and on every occasion—tribute to whom tribute—custom to whom custom—fear to whom fear—honour to whom honour*—or as the Saviour briefly sums up the case, “ Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar’s, and unto God the things that are God’s.”†

And mark with care, the holy motive and exalted principle upon which this submission is to be rendered ; it is to be yielded not reluctantly, but cheerfully and gladly, “ *for the Lord’s sake.*” The civil magistrate has authority to bear the sword, and it was never designed by the will of heaven that he should “ bear it in vain.” And this circumstance is held out, as a warning to those who are not inclined to be influenced by higher motives. “ Rulers,” St. Paul tells us, “ are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power ? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same. For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid ; for he beareth not the sword in vain : for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.”‡ But are these the only motives, are these the highest considerations that ought to sway the follower of Christ ? No, my brethren ! he must needs be subject not only for wrath but also for conscience sake ;§ yea, from a motive higher still, “ for the Lord’s sake :” from a supreme regard to the will, a paramount respect for the law and honour of Christ. The christian reflects how much the glory of his Redeemer is concerned in this matter ; he knows that the confusion and anarchy which result from the contempt of human laws and institutions, have a tendency to bring discredit upon the Christian faith ; and on the other hand that a strict and conscientious regard for them, reflects a glory upon his religion, as well as upon its illustrious author. These motives are sufficient for

* Rom. xiii. 7. § Matt. xxii. 21. † Rom. xiii. 3-4. ‡ Ibid. xiii. 5.

him ; he knows his duty, and he discharges it for *the Lord's sake*.

3. We owe a further duty to our earthly sovereigns, and that is *to pray for them*. Is it so that their character and our own interests are so closely connected that they must prove to us and our fellow subjects a blessing or a curse? Then let us supplicate in their behalf, the everlasting God, remembering that "the hearts of kings are in his rule and governance, and that he can dispose and turn them as it seemeth best to his godly wisdom." The language of our Liturgy here is in beautiful accordance with the language of Holy writ. "The king's heart," says Solomon, "is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water, he turneth it whithersoever he will,"* and the duty resulting from this circumstance is clearly exhibited by St. Paul : "I will," he says, "that first of all, supplications and prayers, intercessions and giving of thanks be made for all men ; for kings and for all that are put in authority ; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth."†

Such is the plain command of heaven, and never was it apparently more needful to evince our deference to that command than at the present critical period. Never in the annals of our nation has a crisis arrived, when it was more requisite to address the God of Heaven in its behalf, and for the illustrious personage who is summoned to preside over it.

When we look back upon the glory and happiness we have so long enjoyed, we are compelled to exclaim, how great and manifold have our national mercies been ! How many *temporal blessings* has a gracious God showered down upon us ! What wholesome laws do we live under ! What freedom do we enjoy ! What power does our nation possess ! What honour among the kingdoms of the world ! And how long have these great and incalculable blessings been secured to us ! But far beyond all other privileges, what *spiritual* mercies have been vouchsafed to us ! What a mercy is it that we are permitted to possess the clear and sacred light of the Gospel of Christ, while other nations are suffered to dwell in darkness and ignorance. What a mercy to have the free use of our Bibles, and to enjoy the ordinances of a pure and Apostolical Church, which recognises and teaches the holy doc-

* Prov. xxi. 1. † 1 Tim. ii. 1-4.

trines of that sacred book ! Can we look around us and behold these evidences of divine mercy and goodness on every hand ? Can we look back and reflect how long we have enjoyed them ? can we look forward and see what God has prepared for us, if we love and obey him, beyond the reach of time and change ? and not feel disposed to say with the Psalmist, " Praise the Lord O our souls, while we live we will praise the Lord : yea, while we have any being we will sing praises unto our God ?"

But, my Brethren ! if we really value these transcendent blessings, let us prove that they are dear in our estimation by pleading with the author and giver of all good things for their continuance with us. Let us beseech him not merely in the language of formal ceremony, but of heartfelt sincerity, to behold with his richest favour our youthful Sovereign, " to replenish her abundantly with the grace of his Holy Spirit, that she may ever incline to his will and walk in his way," and that the reign which has now commenced, may prove, through the blessing of heaven upon it, an era of light and peace, and holiness and happiness to our country. Let us pray that the Constitution of our country, which has so long been the glory of our nation and the admiration of the world, may be preserved in its integrity ; that our Church, notwithstanding its numerous assailants, may still flourish, and bless the land where it exists ; that the pure principles of Protestant Faith may still be adhered to with unbending firmness—in a word, that we may be " a people fearing God and working righteousness." If we have ever traced the histories of those great powers which in different ages have held the sovereignty and rule in this lower world, if we have ever attended to the assurance of God in Holy Writ, we shall know that national prosperity and national piety must go hand in hand. While England fears God, and reveres the Gospel of Christ, England will stand and flourish ; when this character is lost her glory must wane, and her power decline. If then we wish well to the present and immortal interests of our fellow subjects, let us pray for the advancement of vital piety among all classes and ranks of men. Then shall our country flourish and rejoice under the favour of the Most High. Then shall our nation rise above the difficulties which at present encompass it, and England shall still be permitted to say, as the favoured nation of old was instructed to do—" What nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them as the Lord our God is, in all things that we call upon him for ?

What nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous"* as those which God has placed in our possession?

4. In conclusion, Brethren, I invite you to learn from the present occasion, a salutary lesson, upon the comparative insignificance of all human greatness. Is it so, that monarchs go down to the tomb like other men; so certainly and so rapidly that it has become proverbial to say, "Ye shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes!"§ It is true that "the sad accompaniments of a sick chamber are as conspicuous in the palace as they are in the cottage; and that all the prerogatives of the greatest monarchs on earth cannot purchase even a momentary exemption from the grasp of death!" Then learn from this fact, how little there is of real worth in all the pomp and splendour and pageantry of the world, how little reliance is to be placed upon the arm of man, even in the most exalted station upon earth, and how requisite it is to look beyond the sphere of human greatness for something that possesses a permanent and intrinsic value. While in rapid succession we behold the kings of this world going down to the dust from whence they were taken; while we see their crowns departing from them, their sceptres passing into other hands, let us lift up our eyes to that king eternal, immortal, invisible, who only hath immortality, and who dwells in the light of heaven—let us look with the eye of faith to our glorified Redeemer—to him who has all power in heaven and earth committed to his hands—whose crown and throne are immutable—whose glory is infinite and eternal; and whose love, and grace, and power are like all his other attributes, "the same yesterday, to-day, and forever." He justly claims our entire allegiance. He is worthy of our best affections. In him, without fear of disappointment, we *may* confidently trust. And happy will it be for you, my Brethren, who are loyal to your earthly sovereign, if you are equally careful to render true allegiance to the King of Kings. There was weight and wisdom in the saying of a prime minister of other days, "Had I but served my God with half the zeal that I have served my king, he would not, in mine age, have given me over to to mine enemies." AMEN.

* Deut. iv. 7-8. § Psalm, lxxxii. 7.

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